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Memorial Sketch of
Dr. William Frederick Poole,
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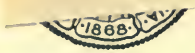

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Memorial Sketch

of

Dr. William Frederick Poole

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DR. WILLIAM FREDERICK POOLE was born in Salem, Massachusetts, on the 24th day of December, 1821. He was a lineal descendant, in the eighth generation, from John Poole, an English emigrant, who settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts, then known as Newtown, in 1632. Dr. Poole attended the common schools in Salem until twelve years of age, and thus acquired a fair knowledge of English branches, and had also, by study at home outside of his work in school, acquired a limited knowledge of the Latin grammar and higher mathematics. His plan of securing a college education at first seemed impracticable, from financial difficulties, but at the age of eighteen years, the way seemed

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seemed clear, and he entered the academy at Leicester. He remained at this academy for three years, during a part of which time he was one of the teachers, and in 1842, being sufficiently prepared, he entered the freshman class at Yale College. He was, however, disappointed in his arrangements in regard to his college expenses, and at the end of his freshman year, left college and engaged in teaching, which pursuit he followed for three years, after which he returned to college and entered the class of 1849, as a sophomore, and was duly graduated, with high honors. Among his classmates were President Timothy Dwight, of Yale College, and President Franklin Fisk, of Chicago Theological Seminary, with whom he maintained a life-long friendship. Near the close of his sophomore year, he was chosen for the position of assistant librarian of

rian of the Society of Brothers of Unity, connected with which Society was a library of about ten thousand volumes. A considerable part of this library consisted of bound volumes, and, in many cases, of complete sets of the leading foreign quarterlies and magazines, and of the best American periodicals. At this time it was customary, in the college, for the topics for essays and other literary work to be announced from time to time in the college chapel, and Dr. Poole, in answer to an urgent demand for such information, presently commenced to post in the library, in connection with each of the topics thus announced, a list of the books in the library relating to such topics, and also a list of the articles in the various reviews and magazines which would be useful in the preparation of essays upon the topics announced. This proved to be of such

such value to the students, that he decided to compile an index of the contents of all the periodicals in the library—a work which had not been before attempted, and which index was published during his junior year, making a modest octavo volume of 154 pages. A second edition was soon called for, and as the work seemed to have met a popular demand, he decided to enlarge it, and during his senior year and a part of the year following his graduation from college, he prepared a new edition of the index, embracing a large number of periodicals not included in the previous edition, making a volume of something over five hundred pages, which was published in 1853. Periodical literature to that time had been much less voluminous than at present, and was also largely of a high character—the most eminent literary and scientific men of the old world being,

being, as a rule, contributors to the well-known quarterlies of the period. The modest volumes, to which allusion has been made, demonstrated the need of a wider and more comprehensive work, and the result was, in later years, the volume known, as had been the preceding editions, as "Poole's Index to Periodical Literature," which made its name a household word in every library, as well as in the home of a great part of the men of letters of the whole civilized world.

THE present age has been one of remarkable progress, especially in every department of scientific research, and the method by which investigators make known to the world the progress of their work, by reason of this fact, has changed. Instead of spending many years, as formerly, in the preparation of a carefully elaborated volume, showing the

ing the results of years of research, the investigator now feels apprehensive lest some co-worker in the same field may anticipate his discoveries, and, therefore, so soon as he has material sufficient for a good magazine article, it is usually published in this method, and when a sufficient number of such contributions have been made, the author collects them and publishes a volume. Periodical literature, too, has enormously increased in volume, and the valuable periodicals are today more than one thousand in number. For the reason just indicated the freshest results of research in almost every department of human knowledge are found in the pages of the various periodicals, and, inasmuch as no person has time or opportunity to read all of these periodicals, an index of their contents, which shall render them available to the student in any field

field of work, is indispensable, and Dr. Poole's early and almost boyish training in this work seemed to indicate him as the person especially fitted for carrying it forward. The result was the publication, in 1882, of the "Index to Periodical Literature," a royal octavo of fourteen hundred and sixty-nine pages, which represented the work of all his spare moments for many years. In this work he was largely assisted by Mr. William I. Fletcher, Librarian of Amherst College, who was associate editor of the work, and several librarians of the great English and American libraries were also called upon to assist in the work and to index several of the periodicals. Dr. Poole, however, had the final supervision of everything connected with this great work, and himself examined and corrected the proof sheets of every page of the Index. Five years

years after the publication of the first edition, a supplement was issued, bringing the work down to 1888, and a second supplement, largely the work of Mr. Fletcher, appeared in 1893.

DR. POOLE'S work in the library of the College Society, which has already been referred to, and the publication of the two editions of the Index, had made him well and favorably known in connection with library work, so that, soon after his graduation in 1851, he was chosen assistant Librarian of the Boston Athenaeum, and the following year was appointed Librarian of the Boston Mercantile Library, which position he held for four years. During his incumbency of this position, he prepared a catalogue of the library, upon a plan of his own, which was largely followed in other libraries, and is known as the "Dictionary Catalogue."

logue." In this catalogue, the author's name, title of the book, and the subjects, were arranged alphabetically, each entry occupying but a single line. The Mercantile Library at this time contained about sixteen thousand volumes. In 1856, he resigned the position of Librarian of the Mercantile Library to accept a like position in the Library of the Boston Athenaeum, where he remained for thirteen years, until January, 1869. Dr. Poole always referred to this period of his life as being especially filled with delightful memories. He was brought in contact with the most cultivated literary society of America. The men who were the principal contributors to the "Atlantic Monthly," in its early days, and to the "North American Review" of that period, among whom were Longfellow, Emerson, Lowell, Holmes, Ticknor, Charles Francis

Francis Adams and Parkman, as well as many of the younger writers, as Henry James, T. B. Aldrich, W. D. Howells and others, were his almost daily associates. The principal writers for the periodical literature of this day frequented the library of the Boston Athenaeum, and Dr. Poole always made special effort to procure for the library everything which would be useful to them in their literary work, and, by meeting them in constant friendly and literary intercourse, established personal relations and friendships with all the people who made illustrious this particular period of American literature, friendships which lasted during the lives of all these most interesting people.

THE first example of what is known as the "Dictionary Catalogue," carried out in a comprehensive method, was Dr. Poole's

Poole's catalogue, before referred to, of the Boston Mercantile Library. Before that time books had been usually catalogued under various systems of classification, the volumes being grouped from their general subjects, as historical, theological, medical, literary, etc. No two persons would, of course, ever agree in the systems of classification, so that no catalogue made upon that plan would be satisfactory to all classes of readers. The method originated by Dr. Poole was at once much more simple, as well as more satisfactory. The books were catalogued alphabetically, as to the name of the author, title of book, and the subject or subjects treated in the volumes, and this method, modified and enlarged as subsequent experience dictated, including careful systems of cross-references, is now in universal use, and is the only method by which the

the riches of a great library can be made immediately available to students, as not only all the volumes on a special subject, but all portions of volumes wherein the same subject is discussed, appear in the catalogue under the subject heading.

AFTER leaving the position of librarian of the Boston Athenaeum, Dr. Poole worked for several years as an expert in the formation and building up of libraries in various parts of the country. His experience in library work made him an invaluable adviser in the formation of city or college libraries. He could make up a list of books which would be most desirable and most called for in a library of a few thousand volumes, thus giving to the library the benefit of his wide experience and saving it from the mistakes often made in the purchase of books for a library

library by those unfamiliar with the work. Among the libraries, in regard to which he was consulted in this way, was that of Cincinnati, and a considerable sum of money having become available for the city library, he accepted there the position of Librarian, organized the library to a high standard of efficiency, and continued in this position until he was called to a similar work in Chicago, soon after the great fire. His work in Cincinnati occupied five years, and his services are looked upon by the people of that city, in the organizing and planning of the work of the library along lines which have since been followed, as permanent and invaluable. Soon after the great fire in Chicago, an ordinance was adopted, in conformity with the State Law, providing a tax levy for each year for the purpose of a public library, and

and Dr. Poole was selected as the man most eminently qualified for the work of organizing this library. He held this position for about thirteen years, and until the Chicago Public Library had grown from nothing to a collection of over one hundred and fifty thousand volumes. This library was popular in its character, it being one of Dr. Poole's most steadfast opinions that, while all immoral books should be excluded, nearly everything outside of this line should be provided to meet the public demand. He used to say that it was much better for a person to read slush and the most foolish novels rather than not to read at all, that the reading of any book induced the taste for farther reading, and that the people who commenced by reading the most worthless books in the library would gradually have their taste formed for higher work,

work, and would become readers of works of positive value.

IN 1887, Dr. Poole resigned the position of Librarian of the Chicago Public Library to accept the same position in the Newberry Library—the fund donated for the establishment of this library by Walter L. Newberry having then become available. It had been decided to make this library one of reference simply, in other words, a library for scholars and people desiring to make careful researches in standard works for their own mental training, or for purposes of literary work. This was a task much more to his taste than anything which had come to him in his previous experience, inasmuch as it would ultimately bring him in contact largely with educators and literary workers. This position he held until the time of his death, in March, 1894, at which time the library

library had on its shelves about one hundred thousand volumes of carefully selected works of value and importance to students and workers in nearly every field of intellectual effort.

ANY memoir of the life and work of Dr. Poole would be most inadequate which did not make full mention of his own literary work. He was descended from a line of Puritan ancestors, and still preserved in his own character the most valuable traits of those antique heroes of our commonwealth. The narrowness of some of the earlier Puritans had passed away in the process of time, leaving permanent, however, the high regard for all that was best in the work of the Church and State. One of the publications which first brought the literary work of Dr. Poole prominently before the public was his essay, afterwards enlarged, in regard

regard to the connection of Dr. Cotton Mather with the prosecution of supposed witches in Salem, Massachusetts. Salem being Dr. Poole's birth place, he made himself thoroughly familiar with everything available regarding its early history. Some writer, upon insufficient examination, had made the statement that Dr. Mather originated the prosecution of various people for witchcraft, such prosecutions being in many cases followed by the death of the alleged criminal. This dictum, not having been questioned, had passed into common belief, and various historical writers upon the early period of New England had stated this as an unquestioned fact. Dr. Poole's examination of the history of Salem satisfied him that these statements were absolutely erroneous, and his papers upon the subject have entirely reversed the previous

previous findings of local history upon this point. Another of the valuable contributions to American History was made by Dr. Poole, while Librarian at Cincinnati, in a paper showing the real origin of the famous ordinance of 1787, by which slavery was finally excluded from the northwestern territory. After the agitation of the slavery question had become one of the leading features in American politics, great credit had been given to certain members of congress for the introduction and passage of this famous ordinance, and their foresight, sagacity and anti-slavery proclivities were most highly commended by anti-slavery supporters and writers. Dr. Poole's researches made clear the fact that the ordinance of 1787, so far as its special promoters and the members of congress were concerned, had no underlying moral purpose, but was

was purely a matter of business. Vast tracts of land in Ohio had been taken up, under the provisions of a law passed soon after the revolutionary war, allowing the holders of the badly depreciated government currency and securities to purchase land therewith. The owners of this land were anxious to induce settlers to go upon it, and as the class of settlers they were endeavoring to influence were almost entirely from New England, and were opponents of slavery, the owners of the land felt that, could it be absolutely determined that the great Northwest would be free from slavery, it would be much less difficult to induce colonies from New England to purchase land. The moral and humane side of this great ordinance is, therefore, to be credited solely to the people of New England, the expected settlers of the great Northwest,

Northwest, whose views on the question of slavery had thus early taken form, and in deference to which views the famous law was enacted.

DR. POOLE found, in Marietta, Ohio, the diary of Dr. Manasseh Cutler, who had been the agent of the New England land companies, and had spent a winter in Washington to secure the passage of the ordinance of 1787, in which diary the object of such ordinance as aiding in the sale of land, and the settlement of the western country, is constantly adverted to. Lobbying in those days would seem, from the extracts given by Dr. Poole from this diary, to be a much less expensive process than at the present time, the good Dr. Cutler's method being simply to invite, from time to time, three or four members of congress to a dinner at his boarding house, where the matter

matter would be discussed over a somewhat more elaborate menu than the prevailing simplicity of diet in Washington. Another interesting feature was brought out in this journal, being the fact that many of the most earnest supporters of the ordinance of 1787 were from the slave-holding states, but at that time the slave-holding states were the most wealthy part of the nation, and the representatives of those states, looking upon the national indebtedness as enormous and as a menace to the future growth of the nation, were especially anxious to forward any measure for the reduction of the public debt, and the prospect of a large portion of the government indebtedness being used in the purchase of land was the argument which, to the southern members of congress, had special weight.

The

THE Puritan proclivities of Dr. Poole, to which allusion has already been made, resulted in his literary work being largely confined to the discussion of historical problems connected with the settlement of New England. He wrote many admirable reviews of historical works, and the last article from his pen, published in the "Dial" shortly before his death, was a scathing review of a historical work by Charles Francis Adams, in which Dr. Poole hotly resented certain remarks of Mr. Adams, criticising the work, methods and character of the Puritan Fathers. A careful and accurate bibliography of the contributions of Dr. Poole to various magazines and critical journals has been prepared by his intimate friend, Mr. D. L. Shorey, and is annexed to this memoir.

OUTSIDE the work of Dr. Poole in historical matters and in criticisms of historical work, he wrote numerous and valuable papers upon the subject of library management and library construction. His position in regard to library buildings for a time aroused much antagonism, although ultimately the correctness of his views has been generally recognized, and the newer library buildings are largely modeled upon some adaptation of his ideas. The early method of a great library building was to have the interior something like the nave of a great church, with the books arranged about the wall and reached by staircases. Dr. Poole attacked this method upon the ground that it was a great waste of room; that it was extremely inconvenient to reach the books; and that the books in the upper part of the room were injured

injured by the excessive heat. The building occupied by the Newberry Library is the best exemplification of Dr. Poole's ideas of library construction. This building was constructed upon Dr. Poole's plans, by the original trustees, under the will of Mr. Newberry. Heretofore the usual method had been to bring the books from all parts of the library to one great and general reading room. His idea was to so classify the books as to separate them into a few great departments, each of which would have its own room, and to have tables for the use of readers in each room, and an attendant, who would in time become familiar with all the books in that special department, and would thus be able to serve the readers with promptness, to assist them in the selection of books, and, on the part of the readers, to make the room more quiet and suitable

suitable for work than were they obliged to do this work in a large room used by all the readers in the library.

DR. POOLE'S long experience in the chosen work of his life had given him an almost unequalled familiarity with books and enabled him to point out to any person desiring to familiarize himself with any special subject the books best adapted for his use. He was the Nestor of American Librarians, and aided all the younger members in the work which he had done so much to raise to the rank of one of the learned professions, and to whom he was always most courteous, friendly and helpful. All the results of his vast experience were placed at their service, and his uniform courtesy and kindness made him unnumbered friends among the members of his own profession. In all parts of the country

country, where public libraries have been organized, the value of his services can be seen and appreciated, although the two libraries, which will be for him his most enduring monuments, are the two in our own city, where he spent the last nineteen years of a long, honorable and useful life.

IN recognition of these services, the Board of Trustees of the Newberry Library direct that this brief outline of his invaluable work in the cause of education and literature, be spread in full upon the minutes, and that a copy of the same be sent to his family.

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Note.—For a condensed history of Dr. Poole, see the sketch of him in Appleton's New Cyclopedia of American History, by Mr. Daniel Goodwin.

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